



SCHOOL OF MEDICINE

Office of Community Affairs and Health Policy

Representative Charlie Melancon
404 Cannon House Bldg.
Washington, D.C. 20515

June 22, 2010

Dear Congressman Melancon,

As you are well aware, the BP Oil spill continues to gush unabated. The New York Times reports and our regional experiences confirm that people of the Gulf Coast are experiencing tremendous psychological strain as a result of the mounting uncertainty about the damage to the environment, potentially ruined livelihoods, risks to health, and the loss of our way of life. Following the Exxon Valdez catastrophe, research indicates that mental illness, substance abuse, domestic abuse, and family strife increased dramatically in affected communities. No one wants to see this occur along the Gulf Coast, and to the extent that it is occurring already, we need to intervene now.

While many populations are affected by the Spill, one community disproportionately affected because of additional language barriers is the Vietnamese American population in New Orleans East. *New Orleans East LA Community Health Center* (NOELA CHC), a clinic developed in partnership with Mary Queen Vietnam Community Development Center and Tulane University School of Medicine following Hurricane Katrina, seeks funding to support the current mental health providers and to add additional mental health specialists to meet the increased demand.

NOELA CHC serves a diverse population and is the only Vietnamese language access health center in the region, thus is uniquely positioned to address the mental health needs of the Vietnamese population. The clients are mostly the working poor, many of whom rely upon the fishing, shrimping, and other coastal industry for their livelihood. NOELA CHC has a demonstrated track record of providing high-quality, cost-effective health care and is nationally recognized as a Patient-Centered Medical Home by the National Committee for Quality



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Assurance. Behavioral health activities integrated into the primary care setting decreases stigma and increases access to services.

I ask that you encourage the State to release SAMHSA or similar funding for this cause. Specific request is \$200,000 for NOELA CHC to maintain and increase mental health services that are linguistically and culturally appropriate in order to mitigate the long term mental health disorders amongst the community.

Thank you for your hard work on behalf of our community during this disaster.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Karen DeSalvo'.

Karen DeSalvo, MD, MPH, MSc

Vice Dean

Office of Community Affairs and Health Policy